

Barriers to communication: Semantics

Semantics is the study of meaning and changes of meanings in words.


- I'll be back in a little while
- I'll be back in a few minutes
- I'll be back around 5:00

People have different meanings and without knowing the person, "a little while" "a few minutes", "around 5:00" can mean different things.

In addition, poor communicators may intentionally use more benign descriptions to avoid situations they think may be troublesome. For example, if you expect that an appointment will take a quite a bit of time, "a little while" might be used to make a bad situation not look as bad.

Relating back to chapter 3, we may become negatively reinforced for being imprecise.

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT
Behavior is followed by a desirable event or state.



\$10 for an A makes it more likely a student will earn more As.

NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT
Behavior ends an undesirable event or state.



Taking aspirin relieves headaches and makes it more likely that aspirin will be taken in the future.

Positive Reinforcement			Negative Reinforcement		
Behavior	Consequence	Effect	Behavior	Consequence	Effect
Earning an "A"	Receiving \$10	Increases likelihood of earning an "A"	Taking Aspirin	Headache ends (is removed)	Increases the likelihood of taking aspirin
			I am not precise in when I plan to meet for dinner	I immediately avoid an unpleasant conversation and immediate disapproval of others	

Therefore, we are more likely to be imprecise in our estimates of time.

Barriers to Communication: Assumptions

To assume is to accept as fact without evidence of proof. We often make the mistake of assuming that others will understand more than we actually say to them. “If it is clear to me, it must be clear to you as well.” In personal relationships, we expect our relatives, friends and partners to know us so well. You tell yourself “She/he ought to know how I feel”, even though you have said nothing about your feelings ([page 216](#)).

In your textbook, you have the example of the father who told his son to get a longer board. The son got a board 3 feet too short and the father got angry and accused the son of being stupid and not listening. When there is a miscommunication, that ought to be a clue that a message was not properly received.


If you have a particular belief (your son is stupid and not listening), then your beliefs influence what you see and don't see (chapter 1) and get angry.

If you believe that the message was not precise, you may change your behavior and become more precise.

Relating back to chapter 3, we may become punished for being imprecise.


TWO FORMS OF PUNISHMENT

Behavior is followed by an undesirable event.



A toddler burned by a hot stove will be less likely to touch the stove again.

Behavior ends a desirable event or state.



A boy who loses his TV privileges for pulling his sister's hair will be less likely to pull her hair again.

Positive Punishment			Negative Punishment		
Behavior	Consequence	Effect	Behavior	Consequence	Effect
Touching a hot stove	Getting burned	Less likely to touch a hot stove	Pulling on your sister's hair	Sitting in the corner away from everyone	Less likely to pull his sister's hair
Being more precise in our expectations	They get mad at us for telling what we think is the truth				

Therefore, we are less likely to be precise in our estimates of time.

Barriers to Communication: Emotion Packed Phrases

Some emotional packed phrases can make it difficult for people to talk to one another. It can make them feel guilty, lower their self-esteem, and make people not express their feelings and thoughts.

- After all I've done for you...
- I wish you would say what you mean...
- After you have been here as long as I have...
- When I was your age...
- Do you know what you are doing?...
- You aren't upset, are you?...
- Talk to me later...
- Do you understand me?...
- I wouldn't do that...
- You wouldn't understand...
- Are you sure that's right?..
- Any very opinionated statement ([page 217](#))

Improving Verbal Communication (page 216)

- Speak with enthusiasm
- Enunciate (to distinctly pronounce)
- Use inflection (modulation of voice)
- Avoid antagonistic words
- Use short, simple sentences
- Adjust your volume of your voice to the situation
- Adjust your speaking rate to the situation
- Keep the door open for feedback